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EAST TIMOR TALKS CAMPAIGN

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MEDIA RELEASE
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EAST TIMOR: CATHOLIC PRELATE BACKS NEW PEACE PLAN

A senior member of the Catholic hierarchy said in Melbourne last night that the peace plan put to the UN last week by Jose Ramos Horta on behalf of the East Timorese people may be 'a break through' and criticised the Australian government for 'not demonstrating any moral response of note to date to the needs of the East Timorese people'.

Monsignor Hilton Deakin, the Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, was speaking to 600 people at a function at the Collingwood Town Hall to mark the 18th anniversary of the East Timorese independence movement, Fretilin.

Referring to Jose Ramos Horta's offer to accept limited Indonesian sovereignty in return for talks with Jakarta, Mgr Deakin said Horta's proposals 'are fraught with danger and risk, as would any hand of cards in which there are no aces and few trumps'.

He doubted Indonesia would accept the plan but said 'when a people is not free, we must defend them. We may need to be lectured by the Indonesians about the lack of humility in our national press. We may need to be reminded that we do not understand enough the nuances of the collective Indonesian mind and culture. But we do not need to be reminded about the mass killings, the summary executions, the imprisonments, the many forms of torture and the deliberate cultural repressions that the occupying army and government agencies have perpetrated against the East Timorese people'.

Mgr Deakin said he made no apology for attending a Fretilin function. 'It is because Fretilin stands for freedom, and also because the East Timorese themselves seek, pray for, and expect their Church to support them in their suffering and search for freedom that I am here and make no apology for it'.

Phil Cleary, the new independent member for Wills in the national parliament, told the large audience that 'self-determination knows no boundaries' and that he would use his term in Canberra to press for independence in East Timor.

Several hundred people signed a petition to the Foreign Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, calling on Australia to support the Horta peace plan and 'to promote it at the UN and in all international forums'.

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The East Timor Talks Campaign is endorsed by: Australian Council for Overseas Aid; Bob Brown; Sr Veronica Brady; Hon John Dowd, QC; Martin Ferguson; Tom Uren; Bill Armstrong; Dr Keith Suter; Janet Powell; Rev Dr Sandy Yule; Phillip Adams; Jo Vallentine; James Dunn; Justice Marcus Einfeld; Prof Peter Singer; Heather Southcott, AM; Fr Bob Maguire, AM, Dr Joe Camilleri, Sr Angela Ryan; Judith Wright; David Scott; Bishop Paul Moore Jr; John Wheeldon; Dr Jocelynne Scutt; Frank Brennan, SJ; Hon Michael Kirby; Bob Debus; Russell Rollason; David Suzuki; Justice Elizabeth Evatt, AO; Noam Chomsky; Thomas Keneally; Stella Cornelius, AO OBE; Timothy Mo; Rodney Hall; Elsa Atkin; Rev Richard Wootton; Prof Garth Nettheim; Dr Ross Fitzgerald; Kaz Cooke; Rev Dorothy McMahon; Bill Ethell; David Shinnick; Senator John Coulter; Dr David Armstrong; Dr Hilary Charlesworth; Dr Judy